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# ON MONKS, NUNS AND 'VULGAR' PRACTICES: THE INTRODUCTION OF THE IMAGE CULT INTO INDIAN BUDDHISM

There is a curious consistency in the way in which major doctrinal changes and innovations in the history of Indian Buddhism have been explained. Some variant of a single explanatory model has been used to account for such diverse things as the initial split within the Buddhist community which produced the Mahāsāṅghika and the beginnings of Buddhist sectarianism, the appearance and growth of relic worship and the stūpa cult, the appearance of the Mahāyāna, of 'celestial' Bodhisattvas, of the cult of images, and of Buddhist tantric practices. The same model has been used as well to account for the disappearance of Buddhism from India.

It is equally curious that we owe the most recent and perhaps most clearly articulated statement of this model to a classicist working in 'late antiquity'. Peter Brown, in talking about the rise of the cult of the saints in Latin Christianity, speaks of "a particular model of the nature and origin of the religious sentiment" which he calls the "'two-tiered' model". In this model:

> The views of the potentially enlightened few are thought of as being subject to continuous upward pressure from habitual ways of thinking current among 'the vulgar'...
>
> When applied to the nature of religious change in late antiquity, the 'two-tiered' model encourages the historian to assume that a change in the piety of late-antique men, of the kind associated with the rise of the cult of saints, must have been the result of the capitulation by the enlightened elites of the Christian church to modes of thought previously current only among the 'vulgar'. The result has been a tendency to explain much of the cultural and religious history of late antiquity in terms of drastic 'landslips' in the relation between the elites and the masses. Dramatic moments of 'democratization of culture' or of capitulation to popular needs are held to have brought about a series of 'mutations' of late-antique and early medieval Christianity.[1]

That this view or 'model' has become an almost unnoticed part of our scholarly method could be easily documented on every side. That it is deeply embedded in even the best standard works on Indian Buddhism is clear from any number of statements in Lamotte. The latter, under the heading "influence du milieu laïc," says, for example:

[1] P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: 1981) 16–18.

> Le bouddhisme n'est pas qu'une philosophie mystique à l'usage des candidats au Nirvāṇa. Ce fut aussi une religion qui sortit du cadre étroit des couvents pour se répandre à travers toutes les couches de la population. Il n'est pas douteux que, sur certains points de la doctrine et du culte, les religieux n'aient dû composer avec les aspirations des laïcs... les succès croissants de la propagande eurent pour effet de transformer le bouddhisme, de message philosophico-mystique qu'il était primitivement, en une véritable religion comportant un Dieu (plus exactement un buddha divinisé), un panthéon, des saints, une mythologie et un culte. Cette religion ne tarda pas à s'infiltrer dans les monastères et à influencer, peu ou prou, les savants docteurs.[2]

Later in the same work and at the end of his short discussion of the cult of images Lamotte says:

> Dans l'ensemble, en face des exigences multipliées du sentiment populaire, le réaction cléricale n'a manqué ni de souplesse ni d'adresse... Dans la vie courante, les autorités spirituelles évitaient de prendre position, toléraient sans permettre, concédaient sans accorder...[3]

In fact this attitude and the "two-tiered model" has particularly affected our understanding of such things as the introduction of the cult of images into Indian Buddhism, almost from the very beginning of the discussion. Sixty years ago Coomaraswamy said:

> ...it may well be asked how it came to pass that Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism alike became 'idolatrous' religions. The answer to this question was admirably expressed by Jacobi over forty years ago: 'I believe that this worship had nothing to do with original Buddhism or Jainism, that it did not originate with the monks, but with the lay community, when the people in general felt the want of a higher cult than that of their rude deities and demons, when the religious development of India found in Bhakti the supreme means of salvation. Therefore instead of seeing in the Buddhists the originals and in the Jainas the imitators, with regard to the erection of temples and worship of statues, we assume that both sects were...brought to adopt this practice by the perpetual and irresistible influence of the religious development of the people in India.'[4]

That this 'model' is still very much current can be seen in even the most recent discussions of the early image cult.[5]

The position here is an odd one. It starts with the assumption – another old one – that Indian Buddhism was a religion dominated by a 'religious elite'. But then it almost immediately asserts that this 'religious elite' – "les savants docteurs," "les autorités spirituelles," "the monks" – were apparently only able to react: change and innovation were apparently out of their hands and were the result of the pressure of popular, lay 'feeling'; it was the laity, it seems, who stimulated change and innovation. But apart from the fact that this would have been an almost complete reversal of the role that "autorités spirituelles" have always had in Indian culture, every indication that we have in regard to the cult of images, for example, suggests something like the very opposite.

[2] Ét. Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien. Des origines à l'ère śaka* (Louvain: 1958) 686–87.

[3] Lamotte, *Histoire,* 705.

[4] A. K. Coomaraswamy, "The origin of the Buddha image," *The Art Bulletin* 9 (1927) 297; the quotation from Jacobi is from his *Gaina Sutras,* (Sacred Books of the East, XXII) (Oxford: 1884) xxi.

[5] e.g. J.C. Huntington, "The origin of the Buddha image: Early image traditions and the concept of Buddhadarśanapunyā," in A.K. Narain, *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia* (New Delhi: 1985) 27, 28, 35, etc.; S.L. Huntington, with contributions from J.C. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India. Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (New York / Tokyo: 1985) 124.

Precisely because it was a later innovation in Indian Buddhism, the development of the cult of images can be much more easily followed than many other, earlier, developments. This is especially true of its introduction and its earlier phases at individual sites. By means of one of the most important – and most unaccountably little used – sources for the history of Indian Buddhism we are able to actually document the role of the Indian Buddhist monastic in this process. In fact, even a preliminary analysis of the large collection of donative inscriptions that have come down to us clearly indicates the preponderant place that the monks and nuns had in the entire enterprise. We might start late and with Sārnāth.

There are 22 image inscriptions from Sārnāth in which the donor is clear that date to the Kuṣān and Gupta periods. In 15 of these – *including the very earliest* – the donor of the image is a monastic.[6] In only three is the donor specifically said to be a layman and one of these is uncertain.[7] In four others only the name of the donor is given without any indication of his status. Even if we assume that this last group were laymen, still there are more than twice as many monk donors as lay donors. The numbers for monastic donors are almost certainly far out of proportion with the actual number of monks in the general population. They are also in striking contrast with what we find at Sārnāth at the end of what Sahni calls "the Mediaeval Period": 1100–1200 C. E. Here we find six lay donors, and possibly two more, but not a single monk.[8] Monastics initiated and disproportionately supported the cult of images at Sārnāth in the early periods.

In the western 'cave temples' we can even more clearly watch the introduction of the cult of images. The caves at Ajaṇṭā were excavated in two main phases. In the early phase, which goes back to the first century B. C. E., there are no images. In the second phase which started in the fifth century C. E., images were an integral part of the new excavations and were introduced into many of the older caves as well. Here there is no doubt about who was responsible for their introduction. We have 36 donative inscriptions connected with images from Ajaṇṭā in which the status of the donor can be determined. In only three of these inscriptions is the donor a layman, and one of these cases is doubtful. The other 33 donors were all monks. 94% of these images were given by monks.[9]

Though less overwhelming, the evidence from other cave sites in western India always points in the same direction. 18 of our donative inscriptions from Kānheri record the gifts of laymen: caves, cisterns, seats, etc. Seven show monks and nuns making the same kind of gifts. But, although laymen never donated images, two additional inscriptions indicate that monks did. The

[6] D.R. Sahni, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sārnāth* (Calcutta: 1914) B(a)1, B(b)59*, B.(b)60*, B(b)172*, B(b)175*, B(b)179*, B(b)293*, B(b)294*, B(b)295*, B(b)300*; H. Hargreaves, "Excavations at Sārnāth," *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India (=ARASI),* 1914–15 (Calcutta: 1920), nos. XIV, XV, XVI*, XVII*, XVIII (pp. 123–27) (Hargraves' nos. XV, XVI, XVII have been reedited in J. M. Rosenfield, "On the dated carvings of Sārnāth," *Artibus Asiae* 26 (1962) 11ff).

[7] Sahni, *Catalogue,* B(b)299[?], B.(d)1; Hargreaves, *ARASI,* 1914–15, no. XIX.

[8] Certain: Sahni, *Catalogue,* B(d)13, B(d)20, B(e)1, B(e)10, B(f)15; possible: B(d)42; certain in Hargreaves, ARASI, 1914–15, no. XXV; possible: nos. XXI, XXII – same donor in both.

[9] Lay: G. Yazdani, *Ajanta,* Part II: Text (Oxford: 1933) no. 11 (p. 64); *Ajanta,* Part III: Text (Oxford: 1946) no. IX.2 (p.89); M. K. Dhavalikar, "New inscriptions from Ajaṇṭā," *Ars Orientalis* 7 (1968) no. 3 – Monastic: Yazdani, *Ajanta* II: no. 9*; Yazdani, *Ajanta* III: VI*, IX.1*, .3*, .4*, .5*, .6*, .7*, .11*, .12; X.2, .3*, .7*, .8*, .9, .10* .11*, .12*, .13*, .15*, .16*, .18, .19, .21; XVI.1*, .2*, .3*; *Ajanta,* Part IV: Text (Oxford: 1955), XXII*, XXVI.2*, .4*; Dhavalikar, "Inscriptions," nos. 4*, 5; D.C. Sircar, "Inscription in cave IV at Ajanta," *Epigraphia Indica (=EI)* 33 (1960) 262 (uncertain).

two inscriptions from Kānheri connected with images both indicate they were given by monks.[10] Moreover, if Leese is right about "the earliest extant figures of the Buddha at Kaṇheri," it is worth noting that the figures she identifies resulted either entirely or in large part from the patronage of a group of five monks.[11] The pattern is very much the same at Kuda. Here 18 inscriptions record the gifts of laymen: caves, cisterns, a bathing tank, etc. In only one case did a layman give an image. There are six additional inscriptions from Kuda which record the gifts of monks: in two these monastic individuals donated caves; in one the object given is unclear; the remaining three inscriptions all record the gift of images by monks.[12] At both Kuda and Kānheri the images found are intrusive – they were not part of the original plan. They were introduced onto the site, and in five out of six cases they were introduced by monks. Many of the images at Ajaṇṭā were also intrusive – and virtually all of them were introduced by monks.

The monastic role in the cult of images is also apparent in the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions – some quite early – from the Northwest. There are 18 Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions in the old collection edited by Konow which record the gifts of images and in which the donor's name is preserved. Of these 18 more than two-thirds, or 13, record the gifts of monks.[13] When we add to these the image inscriptions that have been published recently the figures change somewhat, but not markedly. I know of nine 'new' Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions connected with images, but in three of these the status of the donor is unclear or problematic.[14] In five others, the donor is a lay person, and in one – *the earliest dated piece of Gandhāran sculpture* – the donor is a monk.[15] It is worth noting that even if in all three of the 'new' inscriptions in which the donor's status is unclear the donor is assumed to be a lay person, this would still mean that almost 60% of the inscribed images were given by monks, and this figure, again, is certainly way out of proportion in terms of

[10] J. Burgess, *Report on the Elura Cave Temples and the Brahmanical and Jaina Caves in Western India* (London: 1883) nos. 6, 7 (p. 77).

[11] M. Leese, "The early Buddhist icons in Kaṇheri's Cave 3," *Artibus Asiae* 41 (1979) 83–93.

[12] J. Burgess, *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and Their Inscriptions (Archaeological Survey of Western India* 4) (London: 1883) Lay: no. 7; monastic: nos. 8, 9, 10.

[13] S. Konow, *Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions with the Exception of Those of Aśoka* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. II, part I) (Calcutta: 1929), nos. XXXVI.1, .2, .4, .5, .6, .7, .8; XL, XLII, XLIII, XLIV, LVIII, LXXXVIII. It should be noted that all but two of these inscriptions (nos. LVIII, LXXXVIII) come from only two sites. Nos. XL, XLII, XLIII, and XLIV are from Loriyān Tangai. The stūpa there has been assigned to "perhaps the second century A. D.," and the characters of the inscriptions are said to be "evidently late" (Konow, p. 106). Nos. XXXVI.1, .2, .4, .5, .6, .7, .8, all come from Jauliān and the situation there is complicated. The images with which the inscriptions are associated, and the inscriptions themselves, have been assigned by Marshall to the second half of the fifth century C. E., but they are a part of the 'redecoration' of much older stūpas. Konow, however, is inclined to think, on the basis of the oddly mixed paleography of the inscriptions, that "some of the inscriptions are copies of older ones, executed when the old images and decorations were restored or repaired" (pp. 92–93).

[14] S. Konow, "Kharoṣṭhī inscription on a Begram bas-relief," *EI* 22 (1933–34) 11–14; J. Brough, "Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara in an inscribed Gandhāran sculpture," *Indologica Taurinensia* 10 (1982) 65–70; A. K. Narain, "A note on two inscribed sculptures in the Elvehjem Art Center of the University of Wisconsin, Madison," in *Indian Epigraphy. Its Bearing on the History of Art*, ed. F.M. Asher & G.S. Gai (New Delhi: 1985) 73–74.

[15] Lay: G. Fussman, "Documents épigraphiques kouchans (II)," *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême-orient (=BEFEO)* 67 (1980) 54–55; 56–58; H.W. Bailey, "Two Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (=JRAS)* (1982) 149; G. Fussman, "Deux dédicaces kharoṣṭhī," *BEFEO* 74 (1985) 34; G. Fussman, "Un buddha inscrit des débuts de notre ère," *BEFEO* 74 (1985) 43–45; – monk: Fussman, *BEFEO* 61 (1974) 57–58. This last inscription is dated in the year 5 "d'une ère qui ne peut être que l'ère de kaniṣka" (Fussman). The assignment of the year has not been universally accepted (e.g. S.J. Czuma, *Kushan Sculpture: Images from Early India* (Cleveland / Bloomington: 1985) 198–99; K. Khandalavala, "The five dated Gandhāra School sculptures and their stylistic implications," in *Indian Epigraphy. Its Bearings on the History of Art*, 68–69) although the arguments against it are not convincing.

the percentage of monks in the total population. It is also worth noting that both of the earliest actually dated Gandhāran images are the gift of monks.

Because images are much more frequently inscribed, and much more frequently and precisely dated, at Mathurā, Mathurān images are probably our single most important source of information on the cult of images, especially in its early phase. Here too the monastic element disproportionately predominates. Of the 26 inscriptions published in Lüders' collection which record the gift of an image and in which the donor's name is preserved, 17 – or almost two-thirds – record the gifts of monks or nuns.[16] When we add the ten more recently published inscriptions in which the donor is clear[17] and the six inscriptions on early images found elsewhere – Kauśāmbī, Sārnāth and Śrāvastī – but known to have come from Mathurā,[18] we arrive at a total of 42. Of these 42 images 17 were donated by lay persons, but 25 by monks or nuns: here again almost two-thirds. But because many of the Mathurān images are more precisely dated, we can make an even more precise chronological analysis of them.

Since the four image inscriptions assigned by Lüders to the Kṣatrapa period (*MI* nos. 1, 72, 80, 86) are not actually dated, our analysis will be limited to dated Kuṣān inscriptions on images of Mathurān origin in which the status of the donor is clear. In columnar form the data looks like this (I include the two Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions dated in an early Kuṣān year, marked with an asterisk):[19]

[16] H. Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions,* ed. K.L. Janert (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philo.-Hist. Kl., Dritte Folge, Nr. 47 (Göttingen: 1961), nos. 4, 8, 24, 29, 41, 67, 80, 90, 103, 121, 126, 152, 154, 157, 179, 185, 186.

[17] R.C. Sharma, *Buddhist Art of Mathurā* (Delhi: 1984), Lay: 181 n.41, 191 n.63, 226 n.153, 226 n.154, 228 n.159; monk: 223 n.148; lay: P.R. Srinivasan, "Two Brahmi inscriptions from Mathura," *EI* 39 (1971) 10–12; B.N. Mukherjee, "A Mathura inscription of the Year 26 and of the period of Huviska," *Journal of Ancient Indian History* (=*JAIH*) 11 (1977–78) 82–84 (=R.C. Sharma, "New Buddhist sculptures from Mathura," *Lalit Kalā* 19 (1979) 25–26; Sharma, *Buddhist Art of Mathurā,* 232 n.169; G. Schopen, "The inscription on the Kuṣān image of Amitābha and the character of the early Mahāyāna in India," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10 .2 (1987) 99–134; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, "On a bi-scriptual epigraph of the Kuṣana period from Mathura," *JAIH* 13 (1980–82) 277–84 (cf. B.N. Mukherjee, "A note on a bi-scriptual epigraph of the Kushāna period from Mathurā," *JAIH* 13 (1980–82) 285–86); monk: D.C. Sircar, "Brahmi inscriptions from Mathurā," *EI* 34 (1961–62) 9–13.

[18] Ahicchatrā: D. Mitra, "Three Kushan sculptures from Ahichchhatrā," *Journal of the Asiatic Society,* Letters, 21 (1955) 67; Sārnāth: J.Ph. Vogel, "Epigraphical discoveries at Sarnath," *EI* 8 (1905–06) 173–79; Śrāvastī: T. Block, "Two inscriptions on Buddhist images," *EI* 8 (1905–06) 180–81 and his "Inscription on the umbrella staff of the Buddhist image from Sahet Mahet," *EI* 9 (1907–08) 290–291; Kauśāmbī: K.G. Goswami, "Kosam inscription of the reign of Kanishka, the year 2," *EI* 24 (1938) 210–12 (cf. A. Ghosh, "Kosam inscription of Kanishka," *IHQ* 10 (1934) 575–76; Ghosh reads the date "the 22nd (?) year of Mahārāja Kaṇiska"); G. Sharma & J. Negi, "The Saka-Kushans in the central Ganga valley (Mainly a review of the new data from Kausambi)," in *Central Asia in the Kushan Period,* Vol. II, ed. B.G. Gafuron, et al. (Moscow: 1975) 15ff. In all of these inscriptions the donors are monastics.

[19] Several images fairly certainly of Mathurān origin and having low numbered year dates have been excluded because of the uncertainty concerning the date or identity of the king referred to in them. This is the case for example with the two inscriptions – assigned to the Kuṣān period – on images found at Sāñcī but thought to have come from Mathurā (cf. J. Marshall, A. Foucher, & N.G. Majumdar, *The Monuments of Sāñchī,* Vol. 1 (Delhi: 1940) 385–87 (nos. 828 and 830; J.M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans* (Berkeley: 1967) 112; A.L. Basham, *Papers on the Date of Kaniska, submitted to the Conference on the Date of Kaniska, London, 20–22 April, 1960* (Leiden: 1968) 108ff; 267ff; 283, 290–91), and with the image from Bodh-gayā dated in the year 64 (cf. B.M. Barua, "A Bodh-Gayā image inscription," *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 9 (1933) 417–19); etc.

| | Kuṣān Year | Type of Donor | – Location | -Source |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (i) | 2 | monastic | – Kauśāmbī | -*EI* 24, 210ff |
| (ii) | 3 | monastic | – Sārnāth | -*EI* 8, 173ff |
| (iii) | (3)[20] | monastic | – Śrāvastī | -*EI* 8, 181 |
| (iv) | 4 | monastic | – Mathurā | -*EI* 34, 9ff |
| (v) | 4 or 40? | lay | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 172 |
| (vi) | 5* | monastic | – Peshawar(?) | -*BEFEO* 61, 54 |
| (vii) | 6 | monastic | – Kauśāmbī | -*Central Asia in the Kushan Period Vol. II, 15* |
| (viii) | 8 | monastic | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 154 |
| (ix) | 14 | lay | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 81 |
| (x) | 16 | monastic | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 157 |
| (xi) | 17 | lay | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 150 |
| (xii) | 23 | lay | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 136 |
| (xiii) | 26 | lay | – Mathurā | -*JIABS* 10 |
| (xiv) | 31 | monastic | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 103 |
| (xv) | 32 | monastic | – Ahicchatra | -*JASB* 21, 67 |
| (xvi) | 33 | monastic | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 24 |
| (xvii) | 39 | monastic | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 126 |
| (xviii) | 45 | lay | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 180 |
| (xix) | 46 | lay | – Mathurā | -*JAIH* 13, 277ff |
| (xx) | 51 | monastic | – Mathurā | -*MI* No. 29 |
| (xxi) | 89* | monastic | – Mamāne Ḍheri | -*KI* LXXXVIII |

The first thing that strikes the eye is the number of monastic donors: two-thirds of the donors of images in dated Kuṣān inscriptions were monks or nuns. But for the hazards of time this number would have been higher. Only two of the Kuṣān image inscriptions recording the gift of lay persons lacked a year date and were therefore excluded from the analysis. But four of the inscriptions recording monastic gifts lacked such a date and had to be excluded. The second striking thing about our columns is the clustering of monastic donors *at the very beginning of the period.*

Apart from one exception, every image that was set up in the first dozen years of the period was set up by a monk or a nun. The exception – the fifth in our columns – is itself very doubtful. Lüders says "owing to the deplorable state of the inscription, the reading of the date is not absolutely reliable." Sahni read it as 30, and Lüders in a note says "it may have been 4 or 40."[21] There is a distinct possibility that it belongs much further down in our columns. However this may be, we need go no further in our analysis to conclude that on the basis of the actual evidence,

[20] The year has not actually been preserved in this inscription, but since the same donor set up images in the years 2 and 6, the year 3 is a reasonable approximation; cf. the following discussion.
[21] Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions* 200 and n. 6.

the cult of images in the Kuṣān period – the earliest period we can actually reach – was almost entirely, and very probably exclusively, a monastically initiated and supported cult. But these inscriptions can tell us even more about the individuals involved in this monastic innovation.

If we set aside the doubtful lay inscription of the year 4 or 40, then we can see that the donors of five of the first Buddhist cult images known in India had at least one more thing in common in addition to the fact that they were all monastics: these donors are all called *trepiṭakas,* those "who know the Three Piṭakas," those who knew the whole of Buddhist sacred literature as it existed at the time (i, ii, iii, vi, vii). This would suggest that they were not 'average' monks, but high ecclesiastics of wide religious knowledge. It would also mean – as we shall see in greater detail in a moment – that the earliest dated cult images set up at at least three major Buddhist sites in the Ganges basin – at Sārnāth, Śrāvastī and Kauśāmbī – and in Gandhāra, were set up by learned monastics, by individuals who "knew the Three Piṭakas" (i, ii, iii, vii, vi). It is also interesting to note that one of the two inscribed images introduced at Kānheri was the gift of a pupil of yet another *trepiṭaka,*[22] and that the donor of the 'other' image dated in the year 4 at Mathurā was a companion monk to another monk who is called a "preacher of Dharma," a *dha[r]mma-[kathi]ka* (iv). The connection between the beginnings of the image cult and learned monastics is everywhere, so to speak, carved in stone.

Yet other things about the donors of these early images emerge from their accompanying inscriptions. The latter indicate that at least five of these images were set up by a group of monastics that knew one another – perhaps intimately. They also allow us a rare insight into the life and multifarious relationships of one learned monk at the beginning of the Kuṣān period.

The learned monk, the Bhikṣu Bala "who knew the Three Piṭakas," himself "caused to be set up" *(pratiṣṭhāpito)* an image in the third year of Kaniṣka at Sārnāth. This is a huge image, ten feet high and three feet wide. Both the stone it is made of and its style indicate that it came from Mathurā, which – as the crow flies – is 300 miles away. He "caused it to be set up" at Sārnāth "at the place where the Lord [i. e. the Buddha] used to walk" *(bhagavato caṃkame),* that is to say, the "promenade, terrace, place for walking" at Sārnāth which local tradition apparently maintained the Buddha had actually used. He also provided this huge image with a large stone umbrella.[23] Some time before or after – the exact year is unsure – this same learned monk "caused to be set up" another image at Śrāvastī. This image is also huge – eleven feet eight inches high – and it too was made in Mathurā which – again as the crow flies – is over 200 miles away. At Śrāvastī also Bala caused this monumental image to be set up "at the place where the Lord used to walk." Here too he provided the image with a stone umbrella.[24]

As Vogel has already said, all the evidence points to the fact that these were the first images set up at Śrāvastī and Sārnāth, two of the most important Buddhist sacred sites in India. It is therefore of considerable significance that the person responsible was at both places the same learned monk, and all of the evidence indicates that he alone was responsible, in spite of the fact that the cost of having the images made and having them transported must have been very great. There is no question about this in regard to the Śrāvastī image: although he attaches two separate

[22] Burgess, *Report on the Elura Cave Temples,* no. 6 (p. 77).
[23] Vogel, *EI* 8 (1905–06) 173ff.
[24] cf. n.20 above and Bloch, *EI* 8 (1905–06) 180–81, *EI* 9 (1907–08) 290–91.

inscriptions to his gift – one on the base of the image and one on the umbrella shaft – Bala himself is the only donor mentioned. The inscription on the base reads:

> [mahārājasya devaputrasya kaniṣkasya saṃ...di] 10 9 etaye purvaye bhikṣusya puṣya[vu]-[ddhis]lya saddhy[e]vihārisya bhikṣusya balasya trepiṭakasya dānaṃ b[o]dhisatvo chātraṃ daṇḍaś ca śāvastiye bhagavato caṃkame
> kosaṃbakuṭiye acaryyāṇāṃ sarvastivādinaṃ parigahe
> *(EI* 8 (1905–06) 181)

> [In the year [3] of the Great King, the Devaputra Kaniṣka, in the... the month of..., on the] 19th [day], on this date the gift of the monk Bala, who knows the Three Piṭakas and is a companion of the monk Puṣyavuddhi, [i. e.] a Bodhisattva, an umbrella and its shaft [were set up] in Śrāvastī, on the Blessed One's Promenade, in the Kosaṃbakuṭi, for the possession of the Sarvāstivādin Teachers.

Here, although Bala identifies himself in part by reference to a fellow monk – Puṣyavuddhi – that fellow monk is not associated with his gift. The gift is said to be Bala's alone. Note here too that what was almost certainly the first cult image set up at Śrāvastī – one of the most important of Buddhist sites – was not only given *by* a learned monk, it was also given *to* a group of learned monks, "the Sarvāstivādin Teachers".

The inscription on the umbrella shaft belonging to the Śrāvastī image, although very fragmentary at the beginning, almost certainly said exactly the same thing as the inscription on the base. No more. In this the inscriptions on the Sārnāth image differ.

There are three separate inscriptions associated with the Sārnāth image: one on the umbrella shaft, which is the longest, one on the front of the image pedestal, and one on the back of the image between the feet. The last of these reads:

> mahārajasya kaṇiṣ[kaṣya] saṃ 3 he 3 di 2[2]
> etaye purvaye bhikṣusya balasya trepiṭa[kasaya]
> bodhisatvo chatrayaṣṭi ca [pratiṣṭhāpito] *(EI* 8 (1905–06) 179)

> The year 3 of the Great King Kaniṣka, the 3rd month of winter, the 22nd day. On this date, by the monk Bala who knows the Three Piṭakas, a Bodhisattva, an umbrella, and its shaft were caused to be set up.

Here Bala is the only donor mentioned. He alone is said to be responsible for setting up "the Bodhisattva, its umbrella, and its shaft." But the inscription on the front of the pedestal says that the Bodhisattva at least – the umbrella and shaft are not mentioned – was "caused to be set up" by Bala *mahākṣatrapena kharapallānena sahā kṣatrapena vanaṣparena,* which on the face of it means: "together with the Great Satrap Kharapallāna and the Satrap Vanaṣpara." The inscription on the shaft is even fuller. It records that the Bodhisattva, umbrella, and shaft were set up by the monk Bala, who is here identified as "the companion of the monk Puṣyavuddhi" – thus identifying the Bala of the Śrāvastī image with the Bala named here at Sārnāth. But it goes on to say that this was done "together with his mother and father, together with his preceptors and teachers, his companions and pupils, together with Buddhamitrā who knows the Three Piṭakas,

together with the Satrap Vanaṣpara and Kharapallāna, and together with the four assemblies, for the welfare and happiness of all beings."

The situation appears somewhat contradictory here. The inscription on the back of the image says that Bala alone set up the image, umbrella, and shaft. The other two inscriptions say that the same act was done – following the usual interpretation of *saha* – "together with" a number of named individuals. The seeming contradiction turns on the interpretation of *saha*: if it is taken literally the inscriptions recording the same event are saying different things; if it does not literally mean "together with" they are not. There are internal indications that seem to indicate that *saha* was not intended to be understood in its literal sense.

The last group mentioned in the shaft inscription according to the way Vogel has printed it is "the four assemblies," i.e., "all monks, nuns, laymen and women". The universalistic character of this group is even clearer if we read *sahā ca sarvāhi pariṣāhi,* "and together with all assemblies," instead of *sahā ca(tu)hi pariṣāhi,* "together with the four assemblies." Vogel admits he hesitated between the two readings.[25] In fact both are possible. But the important point here is that in either case it is very difficult to believe that the inscription intended to say that the image, etc., at Sārnāth was "caused to be set up" by Bala "together with" – *literally* – "all monks, nuns, laymen and women". In fact several individuals and subgroups who would fall into the larger categories, 'monks', etc., have already been specifically mentioned. It seems much more likely that the *saha* construction is used here – perhaps everywhere in Buddhist donative inscriptions – as a means by which the donor can share the merit of his act by explicitly associating others with it. He shares or 'transfers' the act rather than, as is frequent elsewhere, the merit resulting from it. The end result in either case is the same.[26]

Whether Bala's gift was literally made "together with" the groups or individuals named, or whether – as appears to be more likely the case – he chose to associate these groups or individuals with his meritorious act, it would seem obvious that he had a special relationship with them, especially with those he specifically names. The Satraps Vanaṣpara and Kharapallāna were clearly important local political figures and it appears likely that the monk Bala, like the monk Buddhabhadra later at Ajaṇṭā, was "the friend of kings". Like Buddhabhadra again, he must also have been a man "of considerable wealth".[27] But the one other specifically named individual he associates with his act has no counterpart in Buddhabhadra's inscription. Bala specifically names, in addition to the Satraps, only Buddhamitrā: a woman – she is not called here a nun, nor a pupil – who "knows the Three Piṭakas". This is of particular importance both for what it reveals about Bala's preoccupations and for the fact that it establishes that he knew and apparently had a special relationship with a woman named Buddhamitrā who – like himself and apparently on the same footing – "knew the Three Piṭakas" or the whole of Buddhist canonical literature as it existed at the time. This in turn is important because it suggests that he probably knew the woman who on at least two occasions – the year 2 and the year 6 of Kaniṣka – "caused to be set up" the first cult images at Kauśāmbī, yet another major Buddhist sacred site.

[25] Vogel, *EI* 8 (1905–06) 176, s.v. L9.

[26] cf. G. Schopen, "Two problems in the history of Indian Buddhism: the layman/monk distinction and the doctrines of the transference of merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985) 33ff.

[27] W. Spink, "Ajanta: A brief history," in *Aspects of Indian Art. Papers Presented in a Symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 1970,* ed. P. Pal (Leiden: 1972) 51; Yazdani, *Ajanta,* IV 114–18.

The earliest dated cult image set up at Kauśāmbī was, like Bala's images at Sārnāth and Śrāvastī, a very large standing image very probably made at Mathurā, which was over 200 miles away. It, again like both Bala's images, was set up "on the promenade of the Blessed One, the Buddha" *(bhagavato buddhasa ca[ṃ]kame)*. These facts alone would suggest that the installation of these three images – the first of their kind at these important sites – was the result of a patterned and co-ordinated effort: all three originated from the same place, all three were set up on a "promenade" associated with the Buddha. This suggestion is further strengthened by the fact that the Kauśāmbī image was set up by a woman named Buddhamitrā who, according to the inscription, "knew the Three Piṭakas". This Buddhamitrā, called here a nun *(bhikhuṇī)*, can hardly be anyone else than the Buddhamitrā "who knows the Three Piṭakas" that Bala mentions in his inscription from Sārnāth. This same Buddhamitrā set up at least three separate images "on the promenade of the Blessed One" at Kauśāmbī: the first in the year 2, another in the year 6, and a third in an unknown year.[28]

The nature of the relationship between Bala and Buddhamitrā is curiously unstated. Buddhamitrā is the only specifically named individual – apart from the Satraps – that Bala associates with his gift. But he does not say that she was a nun, nor does he indicate that she was his pupil. Buddhamitrā, though specifically mentioned by Bala, does not mention him at all in any of her three inscriptions. She indicates that she was a nun, but gives no indication of who her teacher was. This is of some significance since it was a common practice already for monks or nuns to identify themselves by reference to the monastic who was their teacher. The association of Bala and Buddhamitrā with one another, as well as their association with Mathurā, is, however, both confirmed and given specificity by the donative inscription of yet another nun who seems to have carried on their joint project. This inscription records the fact that in the year 33 a nun named Dhanavatī "caused to be set up" at Mathurā an image. Dhanavatī describes herself both as a nun and as "the sister's daughter of the nun Buddhamitrā, who knows the Tripiṭaka, the female pupil of the monk Bala, who knows the Tripiṭaka" *(bhīkṣusya balasya [t]repiṭakasya antevā[si]n(ī)y(e) [bhi]kṣuṇiye tre(piṭi)[kā]ye buddha[mi]trāy[e] bhāgineyīye, MI* no. 24). 30 years after Buddhamitrā set up her first image at Kauśāmbī, her maternal niece set up an image at Mathurā. The niece identified herself exclusively in terms of her relationship to Buddhamitrā, and identified Buddhamitrā in turn as a 'pupil' of Bala. That neither of the latter made reference to Buddhamitrā's 'pupil-hood' is curious, but it is clear that their names were still linked by the generation that followed them.

If the connection between learned monastics and the beginnings of the image cult is everywhere apparent, it is even more specifically so in the Bala-Buddhamitrā inscriptions. We seem to see here something like an intentional, organized, even co-ordinated distribution of early images from a central point. The earliest cult images at three of the most important Buddhist sites in the Ganges Basin – Kauśāmbī, Śrāvastī and Sārnāth – almost certainly came from Mathurā where scholarly opinion is more and more inclined to locate the production of the first Buddha images.[29] The production, transportation, and installation of all these images – again, the first at

[28] See the sources cited for Kauśāmbī in n.18 above.

[29] On the wide distribution of Mathurān images see J. E. van Lohuizen- de Leeuw, "Gandhāra and Mathurā: their cultural relationship," in *Aspects of Indian Art,* 39 and notes; van Lohuizen- de Leeuw, "New evidence with regard to the origin of the Buddha image," in *South Asian Archaeology 1979,* ed. H. Härtel (Berlin: 1981) 393–94.

these sites – was effected by at least two monastics who knew one another in one or more capacities. And both of these individuals were, in their contemporary idiom, very learned. All the evidence suggests that these learned monastics were, in A. L. Basham's words, "propagandists for a new cult,"[30] and that this 'propaganda' was effected in a systematic fashion. This can only mean that the only "autorités spirituelles" that we have actual knowledge of, far from "taking no position," were the sponsors and initiators of one of the most radical and far reaching innovations in Indian Buddhist cult practice. That some of these "autorités spirituelles" were women brings us to the last aspect of the question that we can deal with here.

If, because of an almost exclusive reliance on textual sources, our picture of the actual Indian Buddhist monk is more than a little skewed, the picture of the Indian Buddhist nun – for the same reason – has been almost obliterated. Oldenberg, for example, says:

> In number they [Buddhist nuns] were apparently far behind monks, and therefore it is to be doubted also, whether at any time there was inherent in the spiritual sisterhood a degree of influence which could be felt, bearing on the Buddhist community as a whole. The thoughts and forms of life of Buddhism had been thought out and moulded solely by men and for men.[31]

That this is off the mark on several counts can be surmised on the basis of what we have seen already of the nun Buddhamitrā: her activities at Kauśāmbī would almost certainly have had profound "influence" there on "the Buddhist community as a whole." It was she who introduced at Kauśāmbī the cult image. In fact nuns, and laywomen as well, seem to have been very actively involved in the development of the "new cult". This will be easily apparent if we rewrite our columns containing the data for the image cult connected with Mathurā in such a way as to show gender differences:

| *Kuṣān Year* | *Donor* | *Kuṣān Year* | *Donor* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | nun | 23 | laywoman |
| 3 | monk | 26 | layman |
| [3] | monk | 31 | nun |
| 4 | monk | 32 | monk |
| 4 or 40? | laywoman | 33 | nun |
| 5* | monk | 39 | nun |
| 6 | nun | 45 | laywoman |
| 8 | nun | 46 | layman |
| 14 | laywoman | 51 | monk |
| 16 | monk | 59* | monk |
| 17 | laywoman | | |

If we set aside the two Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, we can note that of the 19 individuals associated with Mathurā who "caused images to be set up" in the Kuṣān period, six were monks, two were laymen, six were nuns, and five were laywomen. Nuns here, rather than being "far behind

30 A. L. Basham, "The evolution of the concept of the Bodhisattva," in *The Bodhisattva in Buddhism*, ed. L. S. Kawamura (Waterloo: 1981) 30.

31 H. Oldenberg, *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order*, trans. W. Hoey (London: 1882) 381; or *Buddha, sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (Berlin: 1881) 389–90.

monks," had parity with them both in terms of numbers and in terms of learned titles. This parity is not new. It occurs already in the earlier inscriptions recording donations connected with the stūpa-relic cult at Sāñcī: there are at Sāñcī 129 monk donors, and 125 nuns. At least four inscriptions from Sāñcī record the gift of a nun named Avisinā who is called one "who is versed in the Sūtras,"[32] and at least three nun donors at Sāñcī had "pupils" *(antevāsin)*.[33] The figures for other early sites show a similar pattern: at Pauni there were three monk donors and five nuns;[34] at Bhārhut 16 nuns and 25 monks;[35] at Amarāvatī there were 12 monk donors and 12 nun donors.[36] The one striking exception for the early period comes from our Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions: in Konow's collection there are 16 monk donors, but not a single nun. There are as well no nuns in the more recently published Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions. The reasons for this are not yet clear. It may well have to do with the fact that the geographic area from which our Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions come is precisely that area which has always been most open to foreign influence and occupation, and this influence and occupation may have determined a different attitude towards the participation of women in monastic lives.[37] But however this might eventually be explained, it is clear already that in addition to geographical factors affecting the degree of participation of nuns in recorded Buddhist activities, there is a marked chronological component as well.

From the very earliest period up to and through the Kuṣān period nuns are everywhere – apart from the Kharoṣṭhī area and Nāgārjunikoṇḍa – present as active donors in numbers similar to those of monks. When we move from the Kuṣān to the Gupta period (fourth – fifth century C. E.) this pattern changes radically. Among the donors of images associated with Mathurā in the Kuṣān age, for example, there were, as we have seen, six monks and six nuns. But in the Gupta inscriptions from Mathurā, while there are again six monk donors, there is only a single nun.[38] This marked drop in the number of nun donors at Mathurā occurs in conjunction with at least one other change which can be detected there: a new kind of monk appears at Mathurā in the fourth – fifth century. Five of the six Gupta monk donors appear to belong to the same group. They all refer to themselves as *śākyabhikṣus* – a title unknown in previous periods.[39] That the presence of these monks is related to the decline or disappearance of nun donors is suggested as

[32] Marshall, et al., *Sāñchī*, Vol. 1, nos. 304, 305, 540, 680.

[33] Marshall, et al., *Sāñchī*, Vol. 1, nos. 118, 645, 804.

[34] S. B. Deo & J. P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavations (1969–70)* (Nagpur: 1972), monks: nos. 5, 7, 8; nuns: nos. 9, 12, 13, 14, 21.

[35] H. Lüders, *Bharhut Inscriptions* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum Vol. II, part II, ed. E. Waldschmidt & M. A. Mahendale (Ootacamund: 1963) 2 and notes 1 & 2.

[36] C. Sivaramamurti, *Amaravati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum* (Madras: 1977) monks: nos. 5, 10, 11, 19, 30, 33, 34, 38, 63, 99, 112, 113; nuns: 31, 62, 68, 69, 70, 74, 80, 83, 93, 96, 99, 100. A number of these inscriptions record joint donations.

[37] The inscriptions from Iksvaku Nāgārjunikonda would be another exception, but they are atypical in several other ways as well; cf. Schopen, "Filial piety and the monk in the practice of Indian Buddhism: a question of 'Sinicization' viewed from the other side," *T'oung Pao* 70 (1984) 121–22.

[38] Monks: Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, nos. 67, 152, 179, 185, 186; Sharma, *Buddhist Art of Mathurā*, 223 n.148 – nuns: Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, no. 8.

[39] The exception is Sharma, *Buddhist Art of Mathurā*, 223 n.148. On the *śākyabhikṣus* and the emergence of the Mahāyāna in the 4th – 5th century C.E. see M. Shizutani, "On the Śākyabhikṣu as found in Indian Buddhistic inscriptions," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 2 (1952) 104–05 (in Japanese); and his "Mahāyāna Inscriptions in the Gupta Period," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku Kenkyū* 19 (1962) 358–55; H. Sarkar, *Studies in Early Buddhist Architecture of India* (Delhi: 1966) 106–07; Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian inscriptions," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 21 (1979) 1–19; Schopen, "The inscription on the Kuṣān image of Amitābha and the character of the early Mahāyāna in India," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10.2 (1987) 99–137.

well at other sites, perhaps most dramatically at Ajaṇṭā and Sārnāth. At Ajaṇṭā there are 33 monastic donors of images, all in the fifth century, and every one of them is a monk. There is not a single nun. Of these 33 monks at least 25 specifically refer to themselves as *śākyabhikṣus*.[40] The same pattern is found in the Gupta inscriptions from Sārnāth: there are 13 monk donors of images, but only a single nun. Here too, 11 of the 13 monk donors refer to themselves as *śākyabhikṣus*.[41]

Although the full details have yet to be worked out, it appears that the appearance or presence of monks calling themselves *śākyabhikṣus* everywhere in the fourth – fifth century C.E. occurs in conjunction with the marked decline or disappearance of the participation of nuns in recorded Buddhist religious activity. The fact that these *śākyabhikṣus* are almost certainly Mahāyāna monks may seem curious, but it appears that the emergence of the Mahāyāna in the fourth – fifth century coincided with a marked decline in the role of women of all kinds in the practice of Indian Buddhism.[42] What is important for us to note here, however, is that until that time – contrary to Oldenberg – nuns, indeed women as a whole, appear to have been very numerous, very active, and, as a consequence, influential in the actual Buddhist communities of early India. The female monastics who, like their male counterparts, were so active in religious giving and the cults of relics and images were, again like their male counterparts, oftentimes of high 'ecclesiastical' standing: they were "masters of the Three Piṭakas," "versed in the Sūtras," and many of them had groups of disciples.

* * *

Before we formulate any general conclusions regarding the material we have seen so far at least one point should be clearly emphasized. In dealing with the earliest phase of the image cult – primarily but not exclusively at Mathurā – I have intentionally restricted myself to inscribed, dated images in which the status of the donor is clear. The reasons for this are very simple: there are no images that can be proven to be earlier, and there is no earlier data on the donors of images. Whether these are *absolutely* the earliest images cannot in fact be known. But even if there were earlier images, they could not have been many and, almost all would agree, they could not have been much earlier. It is, therefore, extremely unlikely that their inclusion would alter the pattern of patronage we have uncovered. In a rough sort of way this can actually be demonstrated. Although none of them are actually dated, Lüders *assigns* four image inscriptions to the Kṣatrapa period. In two of these the status of the donor is unclear (nos. 72, 86); in one the donor is a laywoman (no. 1); in the other the donor is a monk. (No. 80, a fifth inscription, no. 155, cannot definitely be connected with an image).

[40] All those marked with an asterisk in n.9 above.

[41] All those marked with an asterisk in n.6 above; the single nun is in Hargreaves, *ARASI* 1914–15, no. XIV.

[42] The possible connection between the emergence of the Mahāyāna and the decline and disappearance of the nun has not been made before, but it – like the 4th – 5th century emergence of the Mahāyāna itself – requires much fuller study. I am now working on a larger project involving both. In general the nun in Buddhist epigraphy has received little attention; see B.C. Law, "Bhikshunis in Indian inscriptions," *EI* 25 (1940) 31–34; A.S. Altekar, "Society in the Deccan during 200 B.C. – A.D. 500," *Journal of Indian History* 30 (1952) 63ff; A.M. Shastri, *An Outline of Early Buddhism (A Historical Survey of Buddhology, Buddhist Schools and Sanghas Mainly based on the Study of Pre-Gupta Inscriptions)* (Varanasi: 1965) 141–44; S. Nagaraju, *Buddhist Architecture of Western India (c. 240 B.C. – c. A.D. 300)* (Delhi: 1981) 32.

These same considerations apply with even greater force to true cult images. While there may have been earlier representations of the Buddha in human form in narrative or even decorative contexts, what evidence we have argues against any long standing *Buddhist* tradition of monumental cult images in a medium other than stone.[43] Unquestionably early monumental Buddhist cult images in stone – like those of Bala and Buddhamitrā at Sārnāth, Śrāvastī, and Kauśāmbī – presuppose not a previously established Buddhist cult image tradition, but an image tradition of a different kind: "All these early images [in stone] from Mathurā and the surrounding area are closely related with the local *yakṣa* figures and with images of Kuṣāna emperors. They belong to the same world, where the concepts of overlordship, of fame and of fortune *(bhāga)* predominate... It has been pointed out that the standing Buddha image is really a replica of the earlier standing *yakṣa* or royal image, but lacking the regalia and insignia of royalty."[44] Surely if there had been a prior tradition of any standing of Buddhist cult images in wood or clay, the stone images that we have would not still be borrowing so heavily from non-Buddhist models. The fact that our earliest extant monumental cult images in stone represent a tradition still groping for its own types and iconography, still working with non-Buddhist models, virtually precludes any long standing development of *Buddhist* cult images in clay or wood. The monumental cult images we have in stone from Sārnāth, Śrāvastī, etc., are probably the earliest that there were.

* * *

Although this has only been a preliminary study of Buddhist donative inscriptions associated with images, still a number of points are already clear. We have seen that the first cult images at several major Buddhist sacred sites – Sārnāth, Śrāvastī, Kauśāmbī, Mathurā – in the early Kuṣān period were set up by learned nuns and monks. We have seen that the earliest dated images in the Northwest were the gifts of learned monks, that it was monks who introduced images of the Buddha into the monastic cave complexes at Kānheri, Kuda, and – massively – at Ajaṇṭā in the fourth – fifth century C.E., and monks who donated new images in the fifth century revitalization at Sārnāth. Though images were introduced at different times at different sites they were almost always introduced by the same group: everywhere either monks or nuns. It would appear that the image and its attendant cult were a major preoccupation of nuns and monks; that they everywhere introduced the cult and everywhere disproportionately supported it.[45] These are not the monks and nuns our textual sources have presented to us, but those monks and nuns, it is coming to be clear, were not in any case the real Indian monastics.

[43] cf. Huntington in *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*, 23–58, where conjecture, especially but not exclusively in regard to texts, is very much in evidence.

[44] D.L. Snellgrove, *The Image of the Buddha* (Paris/Tokyo: 1978) 53–54.

[45] It is equally clear that the sectarian affiliation of these monks and nuns has little, if any, bearing on their association with the image cult. While the monks promoting the cult in the 4th – 5th century at Ajaṇṭā, Sārnāth, and Mathurā were predominately Mahāyāna monks, those involved in the same cult at Śrāvastī, Kauśāmbī, Mathurā, etc., in the Kuṣān period almost certainly were not. The widespread assumption that connects the image cult with the Mahāyāna is simply not well-founded (cf. Schopen, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 21 (1979) 16 n.7; D. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors*, Vol. I (Boston: 1987) 49).

A picture of the actual Indian Buddhist monk and nun is gradually emerging, and these monks and nuns differ markedly from the ideal monk and nun which have been presented on the basis of textual material alone. The actual monk, unlike the textual monk, appears to have been deeply involved in religious giving and cult practice of every kind from the very beginning. He is preoccupied not with *nirvāṇa* but above all else with what appears to have been a strongly felt obligation to his parents, whether living or dead. He is concerned as well, for example, with the health of his companions and teachers. He appears, in short, as very human and very vulnerable.[46] We do not yet understand him well by any means, but the work of Peter Brown, with which we started the present essay, may not only provide us with an alternative model for change and innovation, it may also give us a clue concerning where we might begin to look in trying to understand this actual monk.

Brown, speaking again about the cult of the saints in Latin Christianity, says "it is not surprising, perhaps, that the cult of the patron saint spread most quickly in ascetic circles." In fact, although he has been criticized for using the term, he refers to "the remarkable generation of Christian leaders" from these circles as the *impresarios* of the cult: "for the *impresarios* of the new cult are precisely those who had taken on themselves the crushing weight of holiness demanded by the ascetic way of life."[47] As Brown himself notes, this suggests that change and innovation "come from a very different direction from that posited by the 'two-tiered' model" and that "the evidence of the pressure from 'mass conversions'" – compare Lamotte's "les succès croissants de la propagande" cited above – "has been exaggerated. Nor is there any evidence that the *locus* of superstitious practice lay among the 'vulgar'. Indeed, it is the other way round..."[48] Our donative inscriptions would suggest an Indian situation in the first centuries of the Common Era that was remarkably parallel in essentials: changes in cult practice came from, and were supported by, learned "ascetic circles". But the possible parallel may go further, and may provide a partial explanation for the Indian case.

Brown again says: "For the *impresarios* of the cult of saints were studiously anxious men. Sulpicius and Paulinus shared the strong link...of having very recently and at no small cost of suffering and scandal, abandoned their previous social identities," and it was they who sought "the face of a fellow human being where an earlier generation had wished to see the shimmering presence of a bodiless power..."[49] Again there appear to be clear parallels in the Indian situation. The renunciation of the household life – especially for high class brahmans – would have entailed the wrenching loss of their "social identity". To judge by the textual sources it was a move fraught with difficulty and generated strong familial reactions.[50] To judge by the inscriptional sources it created a disproportionately strong sense of anxiety in regard to their 'aban-

[46] cf. Schopen, *T'oung Pao* 70 (1984) 110–26 and *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985) 22–47. In the first of these earlier pieces especially I have not always distinguished clearly between monk and nun donors and have used the term "monk" when I should have used the term "monastic". The degree of concern for their parents on the part of nuns as a separate category is therefore not clearly discernible there.

[47] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* 57, 30, 67; for the criticism see J. Fontaine, "Le culte des saints et ses implications sociologiques. Réflexions sur un récent essai de Peter Brown," *Analecta Bollandiana* 100 (1982) 17–41; esp. 23ff.

[48] Brown, *Cult*, 32.

[49] Brown, *Cult*, 63–64; 51.

[50] A. Bareau, "Les réactions des families dont un membre devient moine selon le canon bouddhique pali," *Malalasekera Commemoration Volume*, ed. O.H. de A. Wijesekera (Colombo: 1976) 15–22.

doned' parents on the part of individual monks and nuns. These concerns, again, would have pressed particularly hard on monks from brahmin families, and it is precisely this group, it appears, that made up the majority of the Buddhist elite.[51] Although much else remains to be understood, it appears that it was this same group that introduced and promoted the cult of images, that sought "the face of a fellow human being where an earlier generation had wished to see the shimmering presence of a bodiless power."

[51] B.G. Gokhale, "The early Buddhist elite," *Journal of Indian History* 43 (1965) 391–402.

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## [Footnotes]

[4] **The Origin of the Buddha Image**
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